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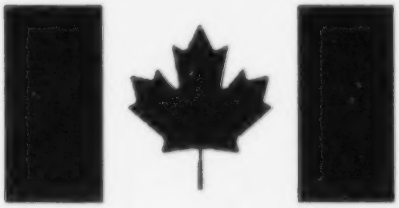

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A Message from the Minister

As the new Minister of Children and Family Development (MCFD), I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce this issue of *Family Matters*.

Our ministry newsletter is one of the best tools we have to share, with each other and with the public, the excellent work taking place across the province. Sharing news, and highlighting the work we do, is a way to recognize, honour and better understand the enormous contribution you make to children and families every day.

As I write, I am particularly mindful of those seventy-four dedicated members of our ministry who were recognized on Wednesday, October 18th, at Government House for their Long Service to British Columbians. It was my privilege to chat informally with many of the recipients of these awards. Their efforts have improved the lives of many people over the years and I extend my appreciation again to everyone for their hard work and devotion.

This is an exciting and challenging time in our ministry as we move through transformation, strategically aligning our programs and services, building new relationships and creating a more effective support system for the children, youth, families and communities of BC.

Every day, you serve communities and families with vastly diverse needs. Thank you for your compassion, skill and dedication.

I look forward to working together to build a bright and positive future for all children and families.

Minister Christensen congratulates Linda Moyneur (left) and Donna Campbell, both 25 year recipients, with their spouses at the Long Service Awards. Linda addressed the audience on behalf of all recipients at the event.

The Youth Perspective

Nearly sixty percent of Canada's population is under the age of 29. Although that's a large number, most young people are not involved in the decision making process on policies, programs or laws that affect them. The result is that youth in British Columbia are becoming increasingly disengaged from the political process, and lack the skills and the opportunity to influence decisions that impact them.

In recognition of this, MCFD has created the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to bring together young people from across the province to share their knowledge, skills and experiences,

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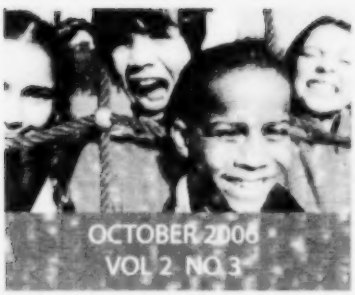

BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

FAMILY MATTERS
YOUR CONNECTION TO THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & OUR SERVICE PROVIDERS
BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Sarah's Story

Sarah Watson is a former Child in Care and author of this month's guest article.

Hi, my name is Sarah. I'm 23 years old and I work at the BC Adoptive Families Association as their Permanence for Youth Coordinator. I have been called a Permanence Expert, but the truth is I have spent a lot of time researching, consulting and trying to understand what permanency really is. I've spent most of my life as a foster child, so understanding permanency isn't something that comes naturally for me.

I've had an open family service file since the day I was born. I've had over a dozen social workers and I've gone through so many foster homes that I don't even know the names of some of the people I've lived with anymore. I've been told that I moved through 27 elementary schools.

Permanency to me is a joke; it's something I laugh at because deep down inside I fear I can never obtain it.

Permanency is having someone to rely on forever, but I can't shake the feeling that everything is temporary and that my only constant is change. I feel that way because I grew up only knowing change. That's the way I've lived. I'm not alone either. Many other young people who have grown up in foster care have as much trouble as I do understanding permanency. How do you understand someone being there for you forever when everybody says it but nobody does it?

In my late teens, I had a social worker who didn't try to tell me he was there for me, he was just simply there. When I phoned him, he would answer or call back, even when I was angry. Sometimes he would call me to see how I was doing.

He genuinely wanted to know about who I am - not what my file said, not what other workers thought. He believed in me and had realistic expectations of me. When he was going on vacation he told me who I could call in his absence (I never did call them).

Most importantly, he stayed as my worker. He made a commitment to be there and then one day I guess I trusted him. I would never admit it at the time but his opinion meant something to me.

His secret was that he believed in me, even when I didn't have a hope for success in this world and when the odds were stacked so high against me. Even when I thought I'd fail, he was my hope and he was my belief that I could succeed. Now I'm successful. Chances are, you are working with kids just like me right now. The odds are stacked against them too, so please be their hope that they might be able to succeed one day. Thank you.

Reaching a Milestone in Old Masset

The Haida Nation became the 24th delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services agency in British Columbia on June 21st. The signing is a major accomplishment for the Haida Nation in moving towards becoming fully responsible for the delivery of their own child and family services.

The signing ceremony in Old Masset, Haida Gwaii, was an emotional two-day celebration. "It was a very proud day for the Haida Nation's most precious resource - the children," said Debra Foxcroft, ADM of Aboriginal and Transition Services. "It touched my heart to see the children, our gift from the creator, dance and sing with such strength and determination, because they know who they are and where they come from."

The agreement is significant because it gives the Haida Child and Family

...continued on page 5

SIGN ME UP

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November: Adoption Awareness Month

November 5 - 7: Child Protection Mediation Course, Kingston, ON

November 12 - 19: Restorative Justice Week

November 16 - 18: Annual Western Canadian Conference on Addictions and Mental Health, Richmond, BC

November 17 - 19: 6th Annual Youth Justice Committee Conference, Edmonton, AB

November 19 - 22: World Forum 2006 - Future Directions in Child Welfare, Vancouver, BC

November 19 - 25: National Addictions Awareness Week

November 20: International Day of the Child

December 6 - 7: Treating Traumatized Adults and Children: A Life Span Treatment Approach, Vancouver, BC

The Youth Perspective cont'd . . .

Stan Williams

as well as what they believe is important to them.

Stan Williams, Special Advisor, Youth Initiatives for Transformation, recently joined MCFD to facilitate the council. Stan says "young people *can* impact and influence decision making, as well as have ownership of the process and feel engaged. As a result, communities will benefit as a whole – you just need to give youth the opportunity."

Stan also brings the voice of Aboriginal youth to the ministry, a section of the population that is even further removed from decision making and political process.

The hope is that MCFD can work with young people to move past barriers and begin to include them in decision making. Not only is this supported internationally through Article 12 of the International Convention on the Rights of Child, it's fully supported by the Province of BC through the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.

Section 70 of the Act includes the legal right of a child "to be consulted and to express their views, according to their abilities, about significant decisions affecting them". MCFD is committed to ensuring these rights are a priority in the overall transformation of the ministry to improve services to children and youth and support them in becoming engaged in government.

Through the council, the ministry will identify what issues face young people, particularly Aboriginal youth, what decisions they make and what their needs are in order to build healthy, sustainable communities. The goal of YAC is to create a ministry responsive to the needs of children and youth by involving and including them in the transformation process and asking for their recommendations around policy and program areas.

"This is an exciting and inspiring time!" exclaims Stan. "I'm passionate about working to support and recognize the positive aspects of all youth – and youth from all backgrounds."

For more information, email Stan Williams or the MCFD Youth Advisory Council or call 1-888-775-1726.

Arriving Alone in BC

Imagine being stowed away on an old, derelict ship for weeks on end, hoping that a better life will be waiting for you when you finally reach your destination. Now, imagine you're a child that has to make the trip alone, without family or a guardian to watch over you. That is what 134 children did over the summer of 1999 as they arrived off the shores of Vancouver, stowed away on freighters from China.

In response to the crisis, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) assumed legal guardianship of all 134, and was tasked with finding them shelter, clothing, and food, as well as dealing with cultural and language barriers. The ministry also became responsible for arranging their legal and refugee-claim support, health care, counselling and schooling.

In order to put a system in place that would allow the ministry to manage this, and similar cases in the future, MCFD created the Migrant Services Program. Director Robin Pike, says "the program, which is still in place today, is involved in numerous cases each year from a broad range of countries, and was designed to assist all children who arrive unaccompanied at any BC Port of Entry."

The program offers advice and services for refugee cases and immigration-related matters that involve separated or unaccompanied children arriving in Canada without the proper paperwork or with unclear immigration status. The Migrant Services Team also assumes the role of Designated Representative under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* for children and youth without a legal guardian.

"There is a growing need for these services in BC, as global issues like human trafficking and illegal human smuggling impact our province", says Robin. Since 1999, over 400 children have been assisted by MCFD's Migrant Services Program. This unique service has also been recognized by both the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Red Cross as an exceptional example of best practice for the treatment of separated children and youth.

If you would like more information on Migrant Services, please contact Robin Pike, Director, Migrant Services Program, or Katherine Chan, Guardianship Worker.

Foster Family Month

MCFD Recognizes Foster Families

In recognition of this important month, the Ministry of Children and Family Development extends its thanks and gratitude to the foster parents of British Columbia for being there for a child who needs you.

In this issue, we are pleased to bring you the second place submission in last spring's MCFD/Hollyburn Family Services writing contest for foster parents, who generously shared their positive fostering experiences with us.

Learn more about the contest in the July issue of Family Matters.

Deena's Song

I am writing to tell you about my amazing foster daughter. I have been a foster parent for about eight months now and it has turned out to be such an amazing experience. I feel so lucky to have a foster child like Deena. Deena came to us just a month after opening my foster home. Like many of the kids in care, she had been through some hard times in her sixteen years and it took her some time to trust me and let me get to know her.

Deena has an incredible mind. She has a hard time following through with her commitment to high school and we have had some tough times working together with her teachers and her social worker to keep her in school. This has more to do with Deena's problems around structure and focussing than it does with the actual academic work. As I've said, she has an amazing mind but she finds it difficult to believe in herself and her self esteem has taken a beating over the years.

Deena often reads me poems she has written and I'm always telling her how talented she is. I encourage her to keep writing. I decided to buy her a guitar for Christmas because I thought perhaps she could turn her poetry into lyrics. Since the day she unwrapped that guitar, it has been her constant companion. Deena practises every spare moment and takes her guitar to school with her everyday. She now has her fellow students and teachers bringing their guitars to school as well and they play together on breaks and after school. She even had a teacher offer to pay her for lessons!

She's realizing she's really talented. She comes home most nights and plays what she's learned for me and my friends. You can see her confidence blossom a bit more every day and it has been such a gift and an inspiration to watch this sixteen year old girl find her voice and find herself.

I believe that our kids in care, through their hardships and unique experiences, can be wise teachers and we have so much to learn from them if we see them for the gifts they are and take the time to listen. And she is only just beginning!

Note: Names have been changed to protect the privacy of parents and foster children.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

Are you a staff member or service provider involved in delivering an innovative program or service? Do you know someone who deserves to be recognized?

Click on the link below to send us your idea in 100 words or less and your suggestion may be featured in a future article. MCF.NewsletterFeedback@gov.bc.ca

NEWSLETTER SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you to everyone who filled out our newsletter survey. We received excellent feedback and appreciate you taking the time to share your ideas with us. Here are the results! Of those who responded:

97% found the newsletter interesting
84% found the newsletter informative
71% found the newsletter reflective of ministry work
95% read the newsletter online & consider it easy to read
55% read it cover to cover

Adoptive Families Association Thanks Foster Parents

October is Foster Family Month and the Adoptive Families Association of BC would like to thank the 3,500 foster parents in BC who provide love and support to children and youth in their care. We would also like to thank the social workers and service providers who play such a vital role in the lives of BC's most vulnerable children, and for their work in supporting foster parents.

Reaching a Milestone cont'd . . .

Services Society the ability, and authority, to deliver designated child and family services to their community.

Handing over responsibility takes place over four stages. The first stage was the signing of the agreement between the Haida Child and Family Service Society, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The second stage, which began after the signing, involves the delivery of support services, voluntary care agreements for children, temporary in-home care, and special needs agreements. The final stages will introduce guardianship services and full child protection services.

Allen Cummings, Aboriginal Transition Manager in the North, said "it was an amazing experience to participate in the ceremonies the Haida Nation put on. Having the ability to witness a new part of Haida Nation history was both an honour and a privilege that will always stay with me."

Wearing traditional button blanket robes, two celebrants from the Haida Nation perform a traditional dance at the signing ceremony in Old Masset.

The signing of the agreement marked an historic achievement for the Haida Nation, and for other Aboriginal communities. Arnie Bellis, Vice President of the Haida Nation Council believes there is now a process in place to deal with the most precious thing the community has – their children. He says they "need us as leaders to step up and take responsibility and be accountable for their well-being".

Tsay Keh Homecoming

June 23, 2006, was a special day for the community of Tsay Keh, as 28 children in care flew into the community as part of a "Coming Home" project organized by MCFD's North Region. Tsay Keh has a population of 150 people and is located on the north end of Williston Lake near Mackenzie, BC. It's a very isolated and remote community with only forestry road access.

Five planes were chartered to transport the children, who were accompanied by social workers, foster parents and adoptive parents. Everyone met at the Prince George airport at 7:00am for the hour and a half flight to Tsay Keh.

When we arrived, we were met on the gravel runway by excited community members with pick-up trucks and vans ready to transport everyone (including food, gifts and 30 watermelons) to the small village a couple of kilometres away.

The community organized day-long activities geared towards making the children feel welcome. Activities included welcoming introductions, a gift exchange, a BBQ, feasting on traditional foods, games and swimming at Blue Lake. Children quickly integrated with their siblings, parents, grandparents and extended family. There was much conversation, laughter and tears. Families got together and took many pictures.

A few of the children warm themselves by the fire after swimming in Blue Lake.

The visit is part of an on-going effort in the North Region to ensure the cultural identity of children are preserved and that kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family are preserved and consistent with the principles of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.

Planning for the trip was a team effort between the Tsay Keh Dene Community social worker Rhonda Loewen, Roots practitioner Lynne Thanos and the Acting Adoption/Guardianship Consultant Rosalinda Bose. Acting Director of Child Welfare for the North Region, Kellie Kilpatrick, also attended and was recruited as the 'acting Fry Bread Maker'. She spent the better part of the morning assisting in the kitchen.

I was thrilled to accompany the children on their trip, to witness the wonder and joy in the children's minds as they flew home, and to see the pride and happiness in the members of the community as they welcomed their children home. It was an emotional day with many hugs, smiles, laughter and tears. The North Region should be proud of the exceptional effort that was made to put this trip together.

Gary McDermott, Deputy Director, Aboriginal Services